

Connecticut School Transportation Association – COSTA

Transportation Committee Public Hearing

February 28, 2011

HB 6448 An Act Exempting Certain School Buses from the first Annual Inspection following registration of Such School Buses

My name is Leslie Sheldon and I am the Operations Manager for All-Star Transportation, a school bus company located in Waterbury, CT. I am speaking on behalf of the Connecticut School Transportation Association (COSTA), which is a trade association comprised of owners and operators of school buses, school transportation vehicles and other associate members. Together, our companies operate more than 10,000 school buses and student transportation vehicles that transport nearly 500,000 children to and from school safely each day.

I am here to speak to the practical implications of HB 6448, a bill that would exempt certain school buses from the first annual inspection following registration of such school buses. We believe this proposal will save time and money for the Department of Motor Vehicles, which will be able to better utilize its inspectors to for critical functions.

The way the system works is that school transportation contractors put new fleets into service for the start of school years which are pre-determined by the contract the vendor has with its school district. These new buses are inspected prior to being registered by the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles. Service bus plates cannot be issued without this inspection.

The Department of Motor Vehicles inspects every school transportation vehicle yearly with the annual inspection cycle starting on September 1st and ending on August 31st. Any new bus is typically being inspected during the last quarter of this inspection cycle. After the new bus is inspected, it is parked while waiting for plates to be issued.

All registrations for school buses expire on August 31st each year. Renewals are issued during the month of August to be compliant for operation for the start of school. If a new bus is registered in July, the contractor pays a six (6) month prorated fee for one month of service and then pays a full year again in August. School starts the end of August or beginning of September. Therefore contractors wait until after August 1st to register their new vehicles.

We are requesting that any new bus that is registered after August 1st be exempt from the next year's inspection cycle. Here is an example of what happens presently:

All-Star Transportation was awarded the contract to transport the Brookfield Public Schools starting with the 2010-11 school year. A fleet of approximately thirty five (35)

new vehicles was put into service when school opened on August 30, 2010. These brand new buses were inspected during the month of August 2010. As the law stands now, they need to be inspected again with the new cycle that started September 1, 2010.

It takes approximately one hour for a DMV school bus inspector to perform an inspection of the vehicle to make sure it meets all of the State of Connecticut safety requirements. If this fleet of buses (Brookfield example) was exempt from the next inspection cycle it would allow the inspector assigned to this fleet to have an extra thirty five (35) hours in his/her work schedule to perform spot check inspections or audits of companies' files for safety enforcement.

There were approximately four hundred forty (440) new vehicles sold to Connecticut contractors by the two (2) major vendors for the start of the 2010-11 school years. With this proposed inspection exemption in place, it would free up four hundred forty (440) work hours for DMV to enforce safety standards with the limited work force that they have. Currently there are nine (9) inspectors for the state to inspect the 10,000 school buses that operate daily.

Also keep in mind that each time a school vehicle is going to be put into daily service, the driver has to do a State mandated pre-trip inspection that is documented by the driver in writing. Any repairs are signed off in writing by maintenance professionals and kept on file for audit by the DMV. Contractors are also mandated by the State to perform a safety inspection of every vehicle by a certified mechanic every ninety (90) days. Therefore new vehicles put into service will have an extensive maintenance check for all safety components four (4) times a year by a qualified mechanic and the safety of the vehicle is not compromised. We strongly feel that this is adequate for a new vehicle for the first year. The Department of Motor vehicles will continue to have the ability to perform spot check inspections of any school transportation vehicles at any time if they feel an inspection of the vehicle or the contractor is warranted.

I have once technical correction to mention on the bill. In line 16, it should say "September," not August, since the new inspection cycle starts on September 1st of each year.

Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions.